

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

BRIAN SCHWEITZER
GOVERNOR



JOHN BOHLINGER
LT. GOVERNOR

**Statement of
Montana Lieutenant Governor John Bohlinger**

**Before the
Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives
On
Benefits of Intercity Passenger Rail Service
Washington, D.C.
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Madam Chair and Subcommittee Members:

I am John Bohlinger, Montana's Lieutenant Governor. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today, to discuss the critical importance of Amtrak's intercity service to Montana and other rural states.

I am here today to speak in support of Amtrak's long-distance intercity service, and the need for continued federal support for Amtrak in general, and for long-distance routes specifically. Most people assume Amtrak's long-distance routes primarily serve vacationers and other leisure travelers. In reality, long-distance routes such as the Empire Builder provide essential transportation to residents of large areas of the US including Montana.

The Empire Builder has provided critical service to Montana communities for 78 years.

The nearly 700-mile segment of the Empire Builder route across Montana's Hi-Line, accounts for one third of the total route, which begins in Chicago and ends in Seattle and Portland. To put this into perspective, the distance traveled by the Empire Builder across Montana is greater than the distance between Washington, DC and Atlanta, Georgia.

The Empire Builder's annual rider-ship of nearly 500,000, is not large from a national perspective. However, as with our rural highway and transit systems, traffic volumes do not tell the whole story, when it comes to understanding the national importance of long-distance passenger rail service.

To understand the importance of the Empire Builder you must first understand the nature of Montana's transportation system. In Northern Montana, which is the area served by the Empire Builder; our transportation system consists of one north-south Interstate Highway and one east-west two-lane highway.

We have no intercity bus service and only limited access to scheduled air service. During the winter, when highways are often closed due to extreme weather,

the Empire Builder provides lifeline transportation to residents and businesses that have few other options.

The Empire Builder also draws riders from many other areas of Montana. Residents of Missoula, Butte, Bozeman, and Billings routinely travel hundreds of miles to access the Empire Builder.

If you were to visit a Montana train depot, shortly before the Empire Builder arrives, as I have, you would see that most of the passengers waiting to board the train are Montana residents traveling to hospitals in Seattle and Portland, or the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota for medical treatments.

You will find military personnel and their families from Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls and Native Americans from the five nearby Indian Reservations traveling to jobs or going to visit family in other states. You will see Homeland Security employees who staff the many border facilities along the US/Canadian border as well as students traveling to colleges in other states. These are only a few examples of Montana residents who rely on the Empire Builder for essential transportation.

From Montana's perspective, the greatest need is a national passenger rail policy that includes long-distance routes with a multi-year federal funding package that supports it. Without such a policy, Amtrak is doomed to forever struggle to survive to provide basic services on all its routes.

We believe that Congress must consider the establishment of a policy that preserves existing passenger rail service. Some recent Amtrak funding proposals include recommendations that states pick up more of the financial responsibility for the services they receive.

Because the population density in Montana is very low, the cost of a state match or contribution, per capita, would be significant and burdensome, especially considering the high fuel taxes our residents already pay. We have the 9th highest gas tax and the 10th highest diesel tax in the country. Montana has 69,452 miles of roads open to public travel. 1,191 miles are Interstate Highways and an additional 10,572 miles are part of other Federal and State highway systems. Montanans struggle to provide the matching funds for highway maintenance.

The State of Montana has 145,000 square miles of land which makes it the fourth largest state.

Our population of 944,000 residents, works out to 6.51 persons per square mile. We have more cattle, sheep, elk and deer in our state than people. We feel that long-distance routes should be excluded from any requirement that might be proposed for increased state funding participation, whether for operating or capital expenses.

Long-distance passenger rail routes, such as the Empire Builder provide national benefits including reduced emissions compared to car travel; travel which becomes more costly in the day of \$3 - \$4- \$5 a gallon gasoline prices. It is an alternative to crowded highways and airports.

For Montanans and citizens in rural states, who have few transportation options, Amtrak provides them essential connectivity to the rest of the country.

We in Montana are hopeful Congress will continue to support Amtrak's long-distance service and not require financial contributions toward long-distance rail service from low population density states.

A national passenger rail system without long-distance routes is **not** a national passenger rail system. We are the United States of America. We are not separate and independent nations.

This concludes my statement. Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in this important process. I would be glad to respond to questions from Subcommittee members.